

# Establishing Ripe Moments for Negotiated Settlement in Counterinsurgency: An Example from Colombia

A Monograph

by

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## Abstract

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Negotiating with insurgents to end a counterinsurgency (COIN) conflict is an undervalued and largely unaddressed topic in US Army COIN doctrine. Historically speaking, however, insurgencies end in negotiated settlements more than any other form of war termination. In fact, the current US strategy to end the war in Afghanistan is to seek a negotiated political settlement with the Taliban. Given these realities, US Army leaders and planners must have a better understanding of the military and government roles in successful strategic negotiations with insurgent groups.

This monograph addresses how current US Army COIN doctrine does not adequately address how to establish ripe moments for successful negotiated settlements in COIN conflicts. The paper is divided into four sections beginning with an overview of what current US Army COIN doctrine says about negotiations and negotiated settlements. The second section presents ripeness theory as a framework to consider the conditions that are necessary for negotiations to occur. The third section includes the case study of Colombia's three negotiations conducted with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) between 1982 and 2016. The conclusion section will discuss the implications for US Army COIN doctrine.

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## Acronyms

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defense Forces)
COIN	Counterinsurgency
COLMIL	Colombian Military
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
DSP	Política de Seguridad Democrática (Democratic Security Policy)
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
FM	Field Manual
GOC	Government of Colombia
HVT	High Value Target
JP	Joint Publication
MHS	Mutually Hurting Stalemate
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UP	Unión Patriótica (Patriotic Union Party)

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## Introduction

Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.

—John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961

Allow me to tell you, from my own experience, that it is much harder to make peace than to wage war.

—Juan Manuel Santos, Nobel Prize Lecture, December 10, 2016

Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) signed a peace agreement in November 2016 that ended the longest running war in the Western Hemisphere. The war tore the country apart for fifty-three years, killed over 220,000, and displaced as many as eight million Colombians from their homes.<sup>1</sup> The negotiation that produced the peace agreement overcame numerous challenges: a history of failed negotiations, organized opposition, decades of bitterness, and irreconcilable ideologies to name just a few. Colombia's "forever war," as it was known, only came to an end after its government and military learned, adapted, and accepted an approach to counterinsurgency (COIN) that focused on the ends rather than the ways and means.<sup>2</sup> An acceptable negotiated peace replaced decisive military actions as the definition of victory.

This is an important lesson for the US Army to heed. As the threats of near-peer conventional conflict rise in areas of the world like the South China Sea, Eastern Europe, and the Korean Peninsula, the focus on counterinsurgency in the Army has waned. Unfortunately,

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<sup>1</sup> Juan Manuel Santos, "Peace in Colombia: From the Impossible to the Possible" (Lecture, Nobel Peace Prize Ceremony, Oslo, Norway, December 10, 2016), accessed February 5, 2017, [https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2016/santos-lecture\\_en.html](https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2016/santos-lecture_en.html). Official totals of deaths, injuries, and displacements vary widely based on source. In his Nobel lecture, President Santos officially acknowledged these figures.

<sup>2</sup> Kyle Johnson and Michael Jonsson, "Colombia: Ending the Forever War?," *Survival* 55, no. 1 (2013): 67–86.

insurgency is not expected to disappear as a threat to regional and international stability, and it is unclear if current COIN doctrine conclusively addresses these potential threats. The last two decades of US and coalition COIN operations exposed how difficult it is to defeat insurgencies outright. Colombia's experience is a useful reminder that victory does not always require an enemy's defeat. In some cases, negotiated settlement may be the best approach to victory.

Colombia is just the most recent example of a negotiated settlement ending an insurgency. In fact, according to a 2010 RAND study, approximately half of all insurgencies since World War II ended in negotiated peace agreements. When the study included other closely-related solutions such as cease-fires or amnesty programs, all but twelve of the seventy-three insurgencies ended in a manner other than decisive military victory or defeat.<sup>3</sup>

The difference between decisively defeating an insurgency and negotiating a strategic settlement is important at the tactical and operational levels of war. There is a direct link between military ends and political objectives when defeating an adversary. Negotiated settlement, however, presents an uncertain role for a land force, like the US Army, because strategic-level negotiations are often considered the purview of diplomats and appointed negotiators. However, as the preponderance of force in US counterinsurgencies, the Army plays the most direct role in shaping the conditions necessary to achieve the desired political end state. Therefore, when decisive military victory is impossible or unsuitable, an Army planner may be required to develop an operational approach that establishes conditions necessary for strategic negotiations.

Unfortunately, current US Army COIN doctrine is unclear about how this might be accomplished because it does not provide sufficient context, theory, or principles of negotiation in a conflict environment. Although it acknowledges that negotiations can help defeat an insurgency, it

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<sup>3</sup> Ben Connable and Martin C. Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010), 180.

does not discuss it in the type of detail that would be useful to an operational planner. As a result, the Army's role in supporting strategic negotiations is largely unaddressed by doctrine. This can lead to scenarios like in Afghanistan, where a negotiated solution is proving as elusive as the Taliban's defeat.<sup>4</sup>

To address problems like this, the indirect approach of negotiation must be expanded in Army COIN doctrine to inform the design of suitable and feasible operational approaches that support negotiated settlements to insurgencies. This paper explores the history of Colombia's negotiations with the FARC to determine how its government's policies and military operations contributed to the successful peace agreement.

This paper is divided into four sections beginning with an overview of what current US Army COIN doctrine says about negotiations and negotiated settlements. This section highlights how current doctrine is unclear about the types of conditions that are conducive to successful negotiations as well as the role the Army should play in establishing those conditions. It also discusses how the preference for decisive military victory in the Army's strategic culture can prevent doctrine from making the necessary changes called for by this paper.

The second section presents ripeness theory as a framework to consider the conditions that are necessary for negotiations to occur. Ripeness theory provides the theoretical foundation behind common ideas of "ripe moments" in conflicts and describes why successful negotiations occur at specific periods during an internal war. The theory is not only useful to frame the case study, but it

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<sup>4</sup> "The US and Afghan governments agree that the best way to ensure lasting peace and security in Afghanistan is reconciliation and a political settlement with the Taliban. The United States continues to support an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned reconciliation process as the surest path to peace in Afghanistan and supports any process that will include violent extremist groups putting down their weapons." US Department of Defense, *Report to Congress: Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, June 2016, accessed February, 2, 2017, [https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Enhancing\\_Security\\_and\\_Stability\\_in\\_Afghanistan-June\\_2016.pdf](https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Enhancing_Security_and_Stability_in_Afghanistan-June_2016.pdf).

is presented as a design tool to help frame the proper end state conditions in an operational approach directed to support a negotiated settlement.

The third section includes the case study of Colombia's three negotiations conducted with the FARC between 1982 and 2016. It includes a brief historical background of Colombia and the conflict as they pertain to the negotiations. It divides the case study into two periods. The first period explains how the first two negotiations failed because the Colombian government and Colombian military's (COLMIL) COIN approach did not establish the necessary ripe conditions. The second then discusses how the COLMIL's operations and GOC's policies successfully established ripe conditions that led to the 2016 peace agreement.

The conclusion section will discuss the case study's implications for US Army COIN doctrine. It demonstrates the importance for Army COIN doctrine to explore ripeness theory and other concepts within the field of conflict resolution as potential tools to expand doctrine's inclusion of negotiation.

## Doctrine Review

The role of doctrine is to provide "a body of thought on how Army forces operate as an integral part of a joint force."<sup>5</sup> For the Army, the "body of thought" for COIN is found in Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies*. The focus of this section is to highlight how FM 3-24 provides an incomplete understanding of the relationship between strategic-level negotiations and COIN operations. The absence of guidance and information can lead to ineffective operational approaches based on false assumptions and incomplete knowledge of how military action and government policies contribute to ripe moments for negotiation. The reason for

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<sup>5</sup> Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), 1.

its exclusion is most likely tied to the Army's preference for decisive military victory, which is an obstacle to any strategic objective requiring a negotiated settlement.

The stated purpose of FM 3-24 is laid out in its introduction:

This field manual provides doctrine that frames counterinsurgency within the context of the range of military operations and provides a framework for the different ways land forces could counter an insurgency. Understanding insurgencies and the operational environment in which they exist, the ways in which the US will attempt to counter insurgencies, and how commanders synchronize their efforts to achieve end states is at the core of what this manual provides to [the Army.]<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, FM 3-24 should be expected to provide a framework for how the Army's range of military options can be arranged in time and space to meet a political objective like negotiated settlement. It should also provide an understanding for how commanders can synchronize their operations with the rest of the joint, interagency, international, and multinational environment. The fault with FM 3-24 is not that it provides inaccurate guidance on negotiations, it is that it does not provide sufficient guidance to be useful in the design of an operational approach. In its 202 pages, only two paragraphs are dedicated to negotiation as a means to end an insurgency.<sup>7</sup>

Chapter ten, "Indirect Approaches," is the only chapter where negotiation is directly addressed. In the section titled, "Negotiations and Diplomacy," negotiation and diplomacy are described as ways to "resolve or defeat an insurgency."<sup>8</sup> It goes on to state that the purpose of negotiation is for a host nation to remove "the root causes that have led to acts of subversion and

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<sup>6</sup> Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), vii.

<sup>7</sup> The term "negotiation" is found elsewhere in the text of FM 3-24, but only in reference to historical examples or tactical-level negotiations between Army commanders and host nation military or government partners.

<sup>8</sup> FM 3-24, 10-4.

violence in order to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region” and that the outcome is “reduced violence and peaceful resolution.”<sup>9</sup>

There are several problems with how chapter ten presents negotiation. First, it only discusses purpose and outcomes of negotiations. It does not address the types of conditions that should ideally be established in order to initiate and sustain the negotiation process. Relatedly, since there are no prerequisite conditions or timing considerations discussed, it contains a false assumption that negotiations can take place under any conditions and at any phase in the conflict. This is reinforced by the simplistic representation of the negotiation process (see Figure 1). As the Colombia case study will illustrate, negotiations within a COIN environment are extremely complex and their outcomes largely depend on the conditions of the operational environment.

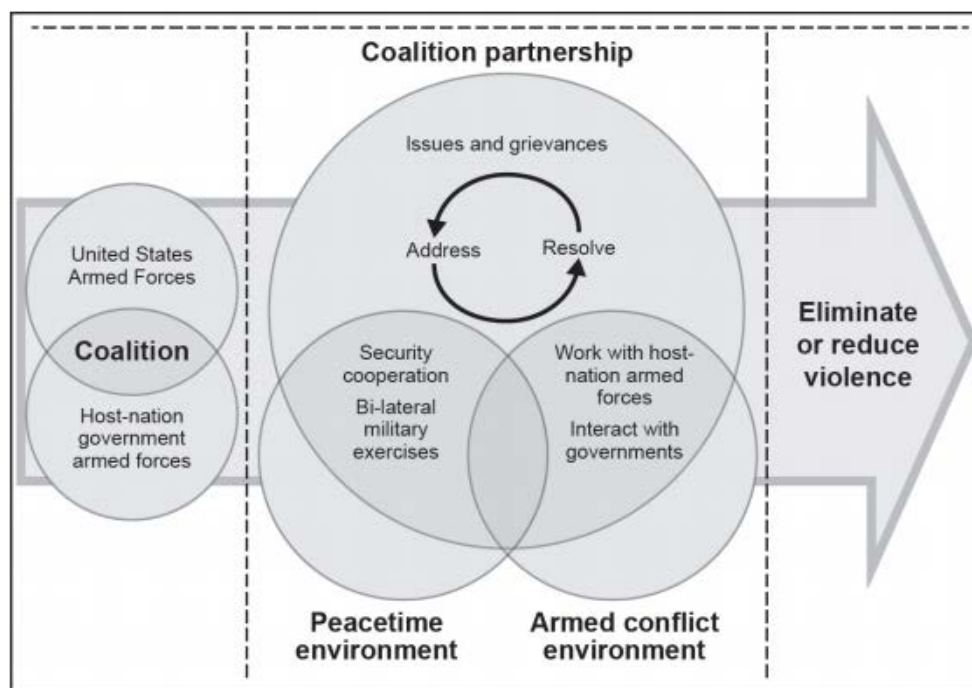


Figure 1. Negotiation and Diplomacy. FM 3-24, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 10-5.

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<sup>9</sup> FM 3-24, 10-5.

Second, FM 3-24 only presents the idealized negotiation process from the perspective of the counterinsurgent. It excludes the numerous variations that can occur due to objective conditions, subjective perceptions, and available spokespersons capable of actually convincing others to accept the results. There may be situations where a counterinsurgent may be willing to negotiate, but lacks the ability to actually address root causes due to weak governance and economy. Alternatively, it fails to address the potential that not every participant in a negotiation does so in order to address root causes and end the conflict. Negotiations are a political process and as such they can be used for ulterior motives and political gains.

Lastly, chapter ten implies a relationship between negotiation and the peaceful resolution of issues.<sup>10</sup> It is unclear if this implies that negotiation periods, which may extend for years, should be conducted without the threat or actual employment of military force. A misunderstanding like this may cause planners to employ de-escalation measures as a blanket policy rather than a tactic tied to a purpose. This was a lesson learned in Colombia in its first two failed negotiations where ceasefires and demilitarized zones (DMZ) were employed without an understanding of how they impacted objective conditions and subjective perceptions. It was not until the third negotiation that Colombia learned that military operations can be employed even as negotiations take place to obtain and sustain favorable conditions.

### Ripeness Theory: Support to an Operational Approach

This monograph utilizes ripeness theory and related concepts to examine the relationship between Colombia's COIN approaches and the results of its negotiations with the FARC. The phrase "ripe moment" is commonly used in the context of a negotiation, but it typically lacks a definition, and as a result it is of little utility for an operational planner. Therefore, this section will

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<sup>10</sup> FM 3-24, 10-5.

introduce the fundamental principles and concepts associated with ripeness theory and establish the context for how the case study will be framed.

William Zartman introduced ripeness theory in his 1985 book, *Ripe for Resolution*. It attempts to explain “why, and therefore when, parties to a conflict are susceptible to their own or others’ efforts to turn the conflict toward resolution through negotiations.”<sup>11</sup> Its basic principle is that conflicts can only be successfully negotiated when participants are ready to do so. Ripeness consists of two conditions: the existence of a mutually hurting stalemate (MHS) and the presence of an alternative solution to armed conflict, otherwise known as a “way out.”

A MHS occurs when each side’s ability to achieve a unilateral military victory are blocked and the costs to continue or escalate the conflict exceed acceptable levels of pain.<sup>12</sup> A MHS is the incentive for each side to search for an alternative way to solve the underlying causes of conflict. The MHS is considered the “push” that forces sides away from armed struggle and makes negotiated settlement desirable.<sup>13</sup>

The “pain” in a MHS is a subjective assessment of the objective conditions within the conflict. It is the perception of pain, not the actual conditions, that matters most in a MHS.<sup>14</sup> This is because each side will interpret objective conditions as painful for different reasons than each other. The loss of legitimacy may constitute pain for one side, while the sudden loss of a key resource

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<sup>11</sup> I. William Zartman, *Negotiation and Conflict Management: Essays on Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 232.

<sup>12</sup> I. William Zartman, “Ripeness: The Hurting Stalemate and Beyond,” in *International Conflict Resolution after the Cold War*, eds. Paul Stern and Daniel Druckman (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2000), 225.

<sup>13</sup> Philipp Lustenberger, “A Time to Fight, and a Time to Talk? Negotiability of Armed Groups,” Working Paper, Swiss Peace Foundation, June 2012, 11, accessed March 17, 2017, [http://www.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Media/Publications/WP1\\_2012.pdf](http://www.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Media/Publications/WP1_2012.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> William Zartman, “The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments,” *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 1, no. 1 (September 2001): 8.



may be more painful for the other. A MHS exists when each side perceives sufficient pain that cannot be overcome through continued violence.

Perception of a MHS is rooted in rational choice theory, whereby each side's actions are based on a cost analysis.<sup>15</sup> It assumes that each side will pick the course of action that it prefers, but that a decision to change is induced by increasing the pain associated with the preferred course of action.<sup>16</sup> Insurgencies, however, arouse intense enmity that may preclude rational thought. Scholars have addressed this in ripeness theory by acknowledging that cognitive impediments, such as pride or enmity, may prevent rational evaluation of objective elements of a MHS.<sup>17</sup>

Since the theory is predicated on conflict participants rationally interpreting objective conditions, scholars responded by introducing methods and conditions that remove impediments and encourage a return to rational thought. They can be overcome through methods such as “shock therapy” and “new leader therapy.” These methods are based on studies that found that imposed costs must be extreme to overcome “pride, negative images, desire for revenge, and militant ideology.”<sup>18</sup>

Shock therapy refers to a “striking event that jolts the mind and stimulates new perceptions of the conflict.”<sup>19</sup> These types of events force each side to reconsider whether decisive victory is worth the costs or if it is even achievable. The shocking event is the catalyst to force each side to

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<sup>15</sup> Zartman, “The Timing of Peace Initiatives,” 8-9.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Dean G. Pruitt, “Whither Ripeness Theory?”, Working Paper #25, George Mason University, 2005, 2-4, accessed October 10, 2016, [http://scar.gmu.edu/sites/default/files/wp\\_25\\_pruitt\\_0.pdf](http://scar.gmu.edu/sites/default/files/wp_25_pruitt_0.pdf). Dean Pruitt defines objective elements of ripeness as “circumstances under which a well-informed, dispassionate, and rational decision maker would conclude that negotiation is appropriate.”

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>19</sup> Jacob Bercovitch, Jacob, Paul F. Diehl, and Gary Goertz. “The Management and Termination of Protracted Interstate Conflicts: Conceptual and Empirical Considerations,” *Millennium* 26, no. 3 (1997): 755.

consider the objective conditions rationally and acknowledge the existence of a MHS. Christopher Mitchell expanded this idea by recognizing the effect that positive shocking events, such as a conciliatory gesture, can also have on a return to rational thought.<sup>20</sup>

New leader therapy suggests that a change in leadership is necessary for one or both sides of a conflict to recognize the existence of a MHS, accept an alternate way out, or both.<sup>21</sup> Dean Pruitt, an author and proponent of ripeness theory, explains that this occurs for three reasons.<sup>22</sup> First, new leaders generally bring with them a different or at least broader perspective of a conflict. Second, new leaders tend to be younger and less committed to sunk costs of older policies. Lastly, new leaders do not harbor the same enmity and mistrust of their opponents, which tend to lower the obstacles to negotiation.

A MHS creates the incentive for each side of a conflict to search for an alternative way out from continued conflict. A way out can exist if there is a feasible and suitable solution or if there is a shared and justifiable optimism about a future solution. It must offer at least the prospect of a satisfactory agreement. Zartman expanded upon this more recently, writing that “parties do not have to be able to identify a specific solution, but they must have the sense that a negotiated solution is possible and that the other party shares that sense and the willingness to search for a solution.”<sup>23</sup> The way out is the “pull” that encourages sides to negotiate by framing alternative solutions as “legitimate and achievable.”<sup>24</sup> “Without a sense of a way out, the push associated with

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<sup>20</sup> C. R. Mitchell, *Gestures of Conciliation: Factors Contributing to Successful Olive Branches* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 88.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Lieberfeld, “Conflict 'Ripeness' Revisited: The South African and Israeli/Palestinian Cases,” *Negotiation Journal* 15, no. 1 (1999): 72-73; Mitchell, *Gestures of Conciliation*, 11, 98, 211.

<sup>22</sup> Pruitt, “Whither Ripeness Theory?”, 5.

<sup>23</sup> I. William Zartman and Álvaro De Soto, *Timing Mediation Initiatives* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2010), 6.

<sup>24</sup> Lustenberger, “A Time to Fight, and a Time to Talk?”, 11.

the MHS would leave the parties with nowhere to go” but to continue the conflict in hopes of a military victory.<sup>25</sup>

The way out can only be legitimate and achievable if it is supported by a peace infrastructure. A peace infrastructure consists of a framework of laws, regulations, and institutions that empower a state to implement and enforce potential or agreed upon settlements.<sup>26</sup> It lowers barriers to trust and increases optimism for potential alternative ways out. It increases confidence and lowers uncertainty about a state’s capacity to uphold agreements from a negotiation. The greater the reduction in uncertainty between two opposing sides, the more likely it becomes possible to predict and trust each side’s actions.<sup>27</sup>

Ripeness theory states that any attempt to negotiate an unripe conflict will fail, but it acknowledges that negotiations may still take place. These types of negotiations typically occur when one or both sides use negotiations for ulterior motives, such as a delaying tactic to buy time while waiting for conditions to change or improve. Negotiations can also be used for political purposes unrelated to resolving conflict such as gaining legitimacy or sympathy from internal and external audiences of the conflict. As will be discussed in the case study, the FARC exploited the first two failed negotiations as a political “form of struggle” to complement its armed revolutionary efforts.

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<sup>25</sup> I.W. Zartman, “Ripeness: The Importance of Timing in Negotiation and Conflict Resolution,” *e-International Relations*, December 20, 2008, 1, accessed January 23, 2017, <http://www.e-ir.info/2008/12/20/ripeness-the-importance-of-timing-in-negotiation-and-conflict-resolution>.

<sup>26</sup> Silke Pfeiffer, *Building up a Peace Infrastructure for Colombia: Lessons from Implementing the Victims Law*, (Oslo: Norwegian Center for Conflict Resolution, October 2015), 1–2, accessed November 9, 2016, [http://noref.no/var/ezflow\\_site/storage/original/application/6dfee9d426d831a90094fee32843e378.pdf](http://noref.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/6dfee9d426d831a90094fee32843e378.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> L.N. Rangarajan, *The Limitations of Conflict: A Theory of Bargaining and Negotiation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 91.

Ripeness theory also acknowledges that conflicts can potentially enter a period of ripeness without negotiations taking place. The theory provides an analytic framework to recognize the vital conditions so conflict participants can avoid wasted moments such as this. However, simply waiting to see if ripeness materializes is a passive action. This monograph goes a step further by using the Colombia case study to show how ripeness theory can guide government and military actions that actually create the conditions of ripeness.

A useful model that can be employed to create conditions of ripeness is Philipp Lustenberger's concept of negotiability. A situation becomes negotiable when a "critical mass within a particular conflicting party considers negotiations as a desirable, legitimate, and achievable alternative to armed struggle."<sup>28</sup> It incorporates the basic principles of ripeness theory, but focuses only on the insurgent, or armed group. The model proposes three "push factors" and three "pull factors" that act on an insurgent group and affect its perception of whether a conflict is negotiable.

The three push factors, or dimensions of conflict, that can be altered through military and government actions are military, political, and economic. The military dimension pertains to any action taken to reduce the insurgent's belief in its ability to achieve its goal through armed resistance. The political dimension recognizes the fact that the loss of legitimacy or political support can also cause insurgents to perceive a hurting stalemate. Lastly, the economic dimension can be leveraged by any action that causes a loss of resources, which will in turn push the insurgents to seek a way out.<sup>29</sup> The relative importance of each dimension will vary depending on the insurgent group and situation, and it is up to the operational planner to determine the degree to which each will impact insurgent perceptions of a hurting stalemate.

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<sup>28</sup> Lustenberger, "A Time to Fight, and a Time to Talk?", 9.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 15.

The three pull factors that can be exploited in a well-conceived COIN strategy are compatibility, confidence in the government's willingness and capacity, and trust in the negotiation process.<sup>30</sup> Pull factors are what help insurgents recognize that a negotiated exit from a MHS is legitimate and achievable. Compatibility is considered a long-term objective that requires both moderation within the insurgent group and the lowering of barriers to negotiation by the state. The insurgent must also be able to overcome an intrinsic mistrust of the state's purposes for negotiating and have confidence that the state will be able to deliver on its agreements. Lastly, trust in the negotiation process refers to the insurgent group's level of confidence in the proceedings of negotiations. Since insurgents are generally not professional politicians, they are only likely to enter into a dialogue if they believe they can retain a level of control in the face of experienced negotiators. Purposeful pre-negotiations that establish mutually agreed upon protocols are an example of how to increase trust in the process.

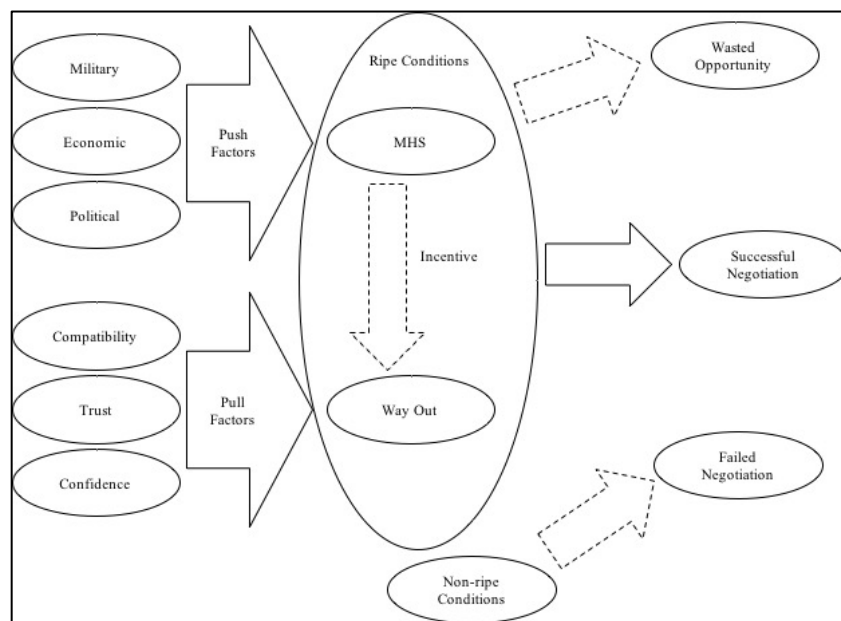


Figure 2. Model of Ripeness. Author.

<sup>30</sup> Lustenberger, "A Time to Fight, and a Time to Talk?", 16–22.

## Case Study: Negotiations between Colombia and the FARC

### Historical Background of the Colombian Conflict

The purpose of this case study is to explore the relationship between COIN and ripe conditions for negotiation using the example of Colombia's three negotiations with the FARC. Because the war with the FARC spanned more than fifty years and involved several other guerilla and paramilitary groups, it is necessary to begin with a brief historical background of Colombia and the overall conflict environment that led to the FARC's emergence. The main portion of the case study will be divided into two parts. The first portion will focus on the two failed negotiations that took place between 1982 and 2002. The second portion will focus on the successful negotiation as well as the period preceding it. The case study will reveal implications for future US Army COIN doctrine and areas for future research, which will be discussed in the conclusion section.

Colombia is a large country with a diverse geography and population that developed a culture of violence over the course of its history. Peter Waldmann defines a culture of violence as "a widespread acceptance of violent methods of conflict resolution ... in society as a whole."<sup>31</sup> The FARC emerged from this culture of violence in an attempt to overcome systemic political, social, and economic inequality. The longer conflict endures, the more engrained violence becomes as the accepted means to overcome stalemate and pursue one's desired ends. In Colombia, Daniel Pécaut, asserts that violence and coercion became fixed components of Colombia's social and political structures and cannot simply be removed.<sup>32</sup> This idea is central to understanding why negotiation is so difficult in Colombia specifically, and in enduring internal conflicts in general. Understanding

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<sup>31</sup> Peter Waldmann, "Is There a Culture of Violence in Colombia?," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 1, no. 1 (2007): 65.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 63.

Colombia's historical roots of conflict puts the challenges of achieving ripe conditions for negotiation in context.

Colombia's history can be tied to its geographic realities. Its steep mountain ranges, triple-canopy jungles, and extensive river systems restrict mobility, making it difficult to access more than two-thirds of the country. The lack of mobility led to a fractured society and a weak government unable to establish a presence anywhere but its urban population centers in the western third of the country. The lack of government presence has permitted dozens of guerilla groups, drug cartels, and paramilitary organizations to find sanctuary for decades. These are conditions similar to what COIN expert David Galula identified as prerequisites for successful insurgency.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1964), 35-38.



Figure 3. “Map of Colombia,” *MapCruzin*, accessed March 17, 2017, [http://www.mapcruzin.com/free-maps-colombia/colombia\\_rel\\_2001.jpg](http://www.mapcruzin.com/free-maps-colombia/colombia_rel_2001.jpg).

In addition to geographic constraints, the government’s institutional weakness also stems from a history of legal impunity for politicians and elites, regional loyalties, and a semi-autonomous COLMIL. Violence, rather than stability, has been the dominant characteristic of political and social interactions in Colombia. David Killcullen and Greg Mills describe this as



Colombia's "democratic insecurity."<sup>34</sup> It is engrained in the society and difficult to overcome, which has resulted in imbedded social inequalities, unequal distribution of property, and the lack of governmental support to the majority of Colombia's rural population groups who reside in the mostly ungoverned rural regions.<sup>35</sup>

For the portions of society that were ignored and marginalized, violence replaced politics. Kidnapping, murder, and sabotage became a common tactics for political recognition. This pattern exploded in 1948 in a ten-year civil war that was so brutal that it was known simply as "La Violencia," which played an important role in the emergence of the FARC.<sup>36</sup> The war ended in 1958 with a power-sharing agreement between the two warring political parties, known as the National Front, which denied political participation to third-party groups like Colombian communists.<sup>37</sup> Forced out of legitimate politics, many communists sought refuge in Colombia's rural regions and turned to the familiar tactic of violence to redress their grievances.

In 1964, a small group of Marxist guerillas evaded a COLMIL counter-guerilla raid and escaped into the jungle. Two years later in 1966, the group convened the First Guerilla Conference, changed its name to the FARC, and established a strategic goal to seize power from the government through armed revolution. This began more than fifty years of continuous war between the GOC and the FARC, earning the dubious distinction as the world's longest active civil war.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Dickie Davis, David Killcullen, Greg Mills, and David Spencer, *A Great Perhaps? Colombia: Conflict and Convergence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 99.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Grace Livingstone, *Inside Colombia: Drugs, Democracy and War* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 42. In the first ten hours of La Violencia, an estimated five thousand Colombians were killed in the streets of Bogotá. Over the course of the entire civil war, between two hundred thousand and three hundred thousand were killed and over a million displaced from their homes.

<sup>37</sup> Davis et al., *A Great Perhaps?*, 4-6. The National Front was a coalition government that alternated presidencies between Liberals and Conservatives from 1958 until to 1974.

<sup>38</sup> Johnson and Jonsson, "Colombia: Ending the Forever War?," 67.

Table 1. Colombian Presidential Administrations Since 1982

Administration	Date	Note
Belisario Betancur	1982-1986	Negotiation/Uribe Accord
Virgilio Barco Vargas	1986-1990	Ended 1st Negotiation
César Gaviria	1990-1994	New 1991 Constitution
Ernesto Samper	1994-1998	Illegal Connections to Cartels
Andrés Pastrana	1998-2002	2nd Negotiation/Caguán DMZ
Álvaro Uribe	2002-2010	Democratic Security Policy
Juan Manuel Santos	2010-Present	Negotiation/Peace Agreement

Source: Author.

## Conditions of Failure: The Betancur and Pastrana Years

The purpose of this portion of the case study is to address how the GOC and COLMIL failure to establish ripe conditions led to the failure of the first two negotiations with the FARC between 1982 and 2002. The first negotiation attempt began during Colombian president Belisario Betancur's administration, but it collapsed in 1987 despite early indicators of progress. The conflict escalated following the collapse, and by the late 1990s the FARC reached its peak of military strength. In 1998, Colombian president Andres Pastrana pursued negotiations in an attempt to settle the conflict before the country collapsed under the strain of the violence. That negotiation never produced meaningful dialogue and was abandoned in 2002.

The Betancur negotiation is an example of a negotiation that occurred without ripe conditions. David Spencer described it as a "risky experiment" because negotiations were attempted "before [the] conflict had burned itself out."<sup>39</sup> The reference to burning out is tied directly to the

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<sup>39</sup> David Spencer, *Colombia's Road to Recovery: Security and Governance 1982-2010* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2011), 1. The negotiation did not officially end until 1990.

lack of a MHS prior to 1982 or at any point during the negotiation process. Furthermore, Colombia's COIN strategy lacked the coordination between the military and government that was needed in order to permit the establishment of a MHS and way out. The result was that neither the COLMIL nor the GOC were able to "push" or "pull" the guerillas into meaningful negotiations.

Betancur's decision to pursue negotiations with the FARC was a response to the public's desire for a negotiated peace process.<sup>40</sup> Colombians were war-weary from decades of violence that dated back to La Violencia. By 1982, it appeared to the public that military victory against the guerillas was impossible, and confidence continued to drop as evidence of systemic human rights violations by the COLMIL and right-wing paramilitary groups emerged.<sup>41</sup> The COLMIL was not weary of fighting at this point, and its leaders publicly rejected the idea of negotiations as counterproductive to its preference for counter-guerilla operations.<sup>42</sup>

Unlike the public, military leaders believed that the COLMIL could defeat the guerillas, which from an objective standpoint, seemed to make sense. The FARC was still more than a decade away from becoming an existential threat to Colombia.<sup>43</sup> It was just one of several guerilla groups, still in its organizing phase, and focused primarily on developing its support base among

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<sup>40</sup> Spencer, *Colombia's Road to Recovery*, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Todd Eisenstadt and Daniel Garcia, *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars*, ed. I. William Zartman (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1995), 273. In 1983, the Colombian Attorney General published a report that confirmed years of suspicion of the COLMIL's involvement with paramilitary and vigilante death squads.

<sup>42</sup> Because the COLMIL historically exercised autonomy from the presidency, Betancur was forced to dismiss the Colombian Defense Minister Fernando Landazábal for his public disapproval of negotiations with the FARC. There is little evidence this action quelled the COLMIL's opposition to the president's policy. Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Russell Crandall, *America's Dirty Wars: Irregular Warfare from 1776 to the War on Terror* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 346.

Colombia's rural peasants. By 1982 it had only grown to 1,200 guerillas spread across sixteen fronts.<sup>44</sup>

After being approached about negotiations in early 1982, the FARC met to formulate its strategic plan to take power from the GOC.<sup>45</sup> The group's senior leaders agreed to participate in negotiations only in order to complement its military objectives. Captured FARC documents confirmed that the group had no intentions to negotiate in good faith. Negotiations offered the FARC an opportunity to legitimate the group in the public's view and build a larger base of support. Rather than seeking an alternative way out, it was complementing its military goals with political forms of revolutionary struggle.<sup>46</sup>

After two years of negotiation, the FARC and the GOC achieved a breakthrough and signed the Uribe Accords in 1984. The two most significant outcomes of the accords were a ceasefire agreement and permission for the FARC to create a political party, the Patriotic Union party (UP), as a pathway for political reintegration. However, neither outcome represented a suitable or feasible way out because there was no MHS present.

The ceasefire did not represent a way out because it did not establish a path toward disarmament, demobilization, or reintegration. Instead, the ceasefire was a perverse incentive for the FARC to seek political concessions while it protected the group from the COLMIL's counter-guerilla operations. The ceasefire precluded the COLMIL's ability to shape a MHS, and thus, the FARC lacked incentive to even seek a way out. The formation of the UP was ineffective because

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<sup>44</sup> The FARC's basic military unit is called a "column," which is usually made up of between twenty and forty guerillas. Two or more columns make up a "front," and when two or more fronts assemble, they are known as a "bloc." For a full overview of the FARC political and military organizational structure see Davis et al., *A Great Perhaps?*, 72-73.

<sup>45</sup> Davis et al., *A Great Perhaps?*, 24.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 25.

the FARC never intended for it to replace the armed revolution the way that the GOC envisioned. Instead, the FARC used the UP to perpetuate its guerilla organization, leveraging the party to garner political legitimacy and public sympathy for its cause.<sup>47</sup>

The FARC's refusal to fully disarm and demobilize, despite surprisingly good results in its first UP campaigns, presented proof to COLMIL leaders that the group was not negotiating in good faith. Unable to take action against the FARC due to the ceasefire, leaders within the COLMIL supported right-wing paramilitary groups who initiated a political assassination campaign against UP members.<sup>48</sup> This thwarted confidence in a way out for the FARC by demonstrating the GOC's inability to control its own military or protect the demobilized FARC members from paramilitary groups.<sup>49</sup> A 1983 Attorney General's report and a 1986 Colombian national prosecutor report found the COLMIL guilty of using paramilitaries as "hired killers who could do unofficially what was not permitted officially."<sup>50</sup> Trust in the GOC collapsed, and whatever optimism there was for a successful negotiation quickly began to fade.

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<sup>47</sup> Eisenstadt and Garcia, *Elusive Peace*, 277.

<sup>48</sup> The official GOC account is one thousand UP members killed. It has also been accepted that at least a portion of the UP members were targeted by drug cartels in addition to the paramilitaries. Between 1984 and 1990 it is estimated that between one and three thousand UP members were killed or went missing.

<sup>49</sup> Paramilitary groups have played a significant role in Colombia since the La Violencia civil war. Organized under the principle of self-defense, most paramilitary groups were loyal to the Conservative party. They emerged primarily as a response to the COLMIL's inability to provide security from the FARC and other guerilla groups in Colombia's rural regions. The legal status of paramilitary groups has been inconsistent under the various Colombian presidential administrations, but in 1997 the Colombian Constitutional Court formally ruled that it was illegal for the GOC or COLMIL to arm, cooperate, or associate with any paramilitary groups. In 1997, numerous paramilitary groups organized under the banner of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia – AUC). Although illegal, the GOC and COLMIL was routinely linked to the AUC prior to the Santos administration. Paramilitary groups are linked to hundreds of human rights violations and have generally operated with impunity from prosecution prior to the Santos administration.

<sup>50</sup> William Avilés, "Paramilitarism and Colombia's Low-Intensity Democracy," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 38, no. 02 (2006): 387.

Virgilio Barco replaced Betancur as president in 1986, and attempted to articulate a more defined way out by establishing a timetable for disarmament, limiting the scope of the negotiations, and threatening military action for failure to cooperate.<sup>51</sup> In order for threats to be meaningful, however, they must be backed up with capability, and in 1986 the COLMIL was still restricted by the ceasefire. The only effective military threat to the FARC at this point was the right-wing paramilitary groups, but their actions delegitimized the GOC's and its proposed way out. The FARC responded to Barco's demands and the paramilitaries by abandoning the UP and the Uribe Accord when it ambushed a Colombian Army squad in Caquetá, Colombia killing all seventeen soldiers.<sup>52</sup>

The first negotiation period with the FARC failed because ripe conditions never materialized. A MHS was not present before Betancur initiated the negotiations and the ceasefire precluded the COLMIL's ability to convince the FARC that negotiation was the only alternative to continued armed resistance. The COLMIL's collusion with the paramilitaries challenged the FARC, but it did so at the expense of the government's ability to establish a feasible way out. The FARC's mistrust of the GOC only solidified as it became clear that the GOC could not control its own military. This reinforced the FARC's perception that violence was its only viable course of action.

The second major negotiation between the GOC and the FARC took place during the administration of Colombian president Andres Pastrana. The FARC's strength reached its peak during his presidency and as the group's leaders prepared for a final offensive against the government. At the same time, the COLMIL struggled to contain the FARC's transition to mobile

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<sup>51</sup> Eisenstadt and Garcia, *Elusive Peace*, 278.

<sup>52</sup> Chandra Lekha Sriram, *Peace as Governance: Power-Sharing, Armed Groups and Contemporary Peace Negotiations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 154. Negotiations officially continued for several more years although nothing constructive was ever achieved. In 1990, with the third Colombian president of the negotiation period in office, the COLMIL attacked the FARC leadership at Casa Verde, the authorized location for negotiations. This officially ended the first negotiation period.

warfare. Pastrana learned some lessons from his predecessors' failures, but was still unable to formulate a coordinated COIN approach to support his negotiation.

Following the failure of the first negotiation, the FARC senior leadership made the decision to move ahead with its strategic plan, which required an army of nearly forty thousand guerillas to transition to mobile warfare, surround Colombia's cities, and destroy the COLMIL forces defending them.<sup>53</sup> In order to meet this massive demand for soldiers and resources, the FARC officially institutionalized its involvement in cocaine production and trafficking. Drug trafficking provided the FARC with increased income and led to rapid growth in size and capacity.<sup>54</sup> It was not quite the size called for in its strategic plan, but by the mid-1990s the FARC senior leadership made the decision to move forward with a transition from guerilla warfare to mobile warfare.

The transition to mobile warfare was gradual, but the FARC became a clear existential threat beginning in 1996. On August 30th of that year, the FARC launched twenty-six simultaneous attacks across the country, including the seizure of a COLMIL base with thirty-one soldiers killed and sixty taken hostage.<sup>55</sup> Larger and more coordinated attacks followed. Then in 1998 the FARC destroyed the Colombian Army's elite 52nd Counter-Guerrilla Battalion in the Caquetá department. The attack removed any doubt that the FARC had become an existential threat.<sup>56</sup> A 1999 Gallup

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<sup>53</sup> For a detailed explanation of the FARC's strategic plan, see Spencer, *Colombia's Road to Recovery*.

<sup>54</sup> The FARC's annual budgets increased to between \$250 million and \$400 million dollars per year from drugs alone beginning in 1999. Crandall, *America's Dirty Wars*, 347; Thomas Marks, "A Model Counterinsurgency: Uribe's Colombia (2002-2006) vs FARC," *Military Review* 87, no. 2 (April 2007): 42; Bruce Michael Bagley, "Drug Trafficking, Political Violence and U.S. Policy in Colombia in the 1990s" (working paper, University of Miami, 2001), 10, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.ugalapagosfall.miami.edu/media/college-of-arts-and-sciences/content-assets/international-studies/documents/publications/Bagley%20Drugs%20and%20violence%20final3.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> Spencer, *Colombia's Road to Recovery*, 25.

<sup>56</sup> Peter DeShazo, Tanya Primiani, and Phillip McLean, *Back from the Brink: Evaluating Progress in Colombia, 1999-2007* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007), 9.

poll revealed that Colombians believed the FARC would eventually succeed in taking power.<sup>57</sup>

Former Colombian Defense Minister, Juan Carlos Pinzón, remarked about the FARC during this period, “In the latter half of the 1990s, the guerrillas were capable of conducting multi-battalion size conventional set piece battles, and controlled large swaths of coca crop growing areas and drug routes, where they forced the displacement of entire towns.”<sup>58</sup>

In the midst of this chaos, President Pastrana attempted to stave off his government’s defeat through negotiations. He granted the FARC a DMZ the size of Switzerland in the Caguán region as a show of good faith for the FARC to join the negotiation. Rather than the type of “positive shock” that could pull an opponent into a ripe moment, however, the DMZ represented what Russell Crandall called a “remarkable gift” to the FARC.<sup>59</sup>

The combination of a large DMZ and an ineffective military insulated the FARC from the pain of the conflict as it simultaneously worked under the cover of the DMZ to escalate the conflict. The DMZ became a de facto autonomous state governed by the FARC, which used it as a base of operations to launch attacks, expand coca cultivation, recruit forces, and train.<sup>60</sup> As a result, the FARC arguably held the upper hand during the Pastrana negotiation. It continued to grow, reaching nearly twenty-thousand guerillas by 2002. Illicit crops, which were almost entirely controlled by the FARC, grew by 42 percent and reached an estimated total of 144,450 hectares in 2002, most of which was grown inside the DMZ. Insecurity spread from the rural countryside to the cities totaling approximately 28,000 murders and 2,800 kidnappings annually by 2002.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Crandall, *America’s Dirty Wars*, 347; Davis et al., *A Great Perhaps?*, 133.

<sup>58</sup> Juan Carlos Pinzón, “Colombia Back from the Brink: From Failed State to Exporter of Security,” *Prism* 5, no. 4 (2015): 4.

<sup>59</sup> Crandall, *America’s Dirty Wars*, 348.

<sup>60</sup> Johnson and Jonsson, “Colombia: Ending the Forever War?,” 71.

<sup>61</sup> Spencer, *Colombia’s Road to Recovery*, 51.



Pastrana eventually terminated the negotiations and ordered the COLMIL to retake the DMZ in February 2002. The policy shift was precipitated by an increase in malicious attacks by the FARC against civilians, energy infrastructure, and small security units. The incident that ultimately forced Pastrana's hand was the FARC's skyjacking of a commercial airliner. By this point, Colombians were ready for a new strategy.

The COLMIL and GOC failed to develop a coordinated COIN policy that could have produced ripe conditions for negotiation. On the issue of military strategy being disconnected from political objectives, Thomas Marks concluded that nobody in the GOC directed the COIN effort, and that the COLMIL was left to conduct the fight by itself.<sup>62</sup> The Caguán DMZ failed to reestablish trust with the FARC. The guerillas had already chosen their military strategy and the COLMIL did not represent a credible threat that changed the group's perception of the pain associated a military solution.

The negotiation process was also not supported by a realistic peace infrastructure capable of convincing the FARC that Pastrana was capable of delivering on the reforms he envisioned. Not surprisingly, the FARC neither felt the pain of a stalemate, nor felt optimistic about a path to peace. Pastrana recognized these shortcomings and established both military and government policies to shape the environment, but it took longer than his four years in office for the reforms to make a difference. His successor, president Álvaro Uribe, eventually benefitted the most from Pastrana's attempts to develop a credible COLMIL that could impose a MHS.

Throughout his term, Pastrana directed a comprehensive reform of the COLMIL to strengthen its capabilities and reputation. He accomplished this by creating a more professional force, improving the military education system, and increasing human rights training. Between

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas Marks, *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute), 2002.

1998 and 2002, the COLMIL replaced large portions of its conscripted forces with high-quality volunteers, which more than tripled the size of its professional forces.<sup>63</sup> The professionalization, training, and increased focus on just war education helped reduce the risk of future human rights abuses, which plagued the military since the Betancur negotiations. The COLMIL increased in quality, but it still lacked the size, mobility, and capability to represent a credible threat to the FARC.

One particular lesson learned during the Pastrana negotiation was how painful counternarcotic operations were to the FARC. Between December 2000 and April 2002, the COLMIL's specialized counter-narcotics brigade, supported by US funding, destroyed nearly 900 drug labs and detained 119 suspected drug traffickers.<sup>64</sup> The FARC-controlled coca fields and drug labs were vulnerable to raids, but in order to take advantage the COLMIL required aerial observation and mobility it did not yet have. During the Uribe administration that followed, the targeting of the FARC's drug trafficking business would contribute greatly to the establishment of a MHS.

## Establishing Conditions of Success: The Uribe and Santos Years

The purpose of this portion of the case study is to address how the GOC and COLMIL established ripe conditions that led to the successful peace agreement in 2016. The period that followed the failed Pastrana negotiation marked one of the most dramatic changes in the Colombian conflict. It began with Colombia on the verge of becoming a failed state and ended fourteen years later with a successful peace accord between the GOC and the FARC. Under Colombian presidents

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<sup>63</sup> Spencer, *Colombia's Road to Recovery*, 44.

<sup>64</sup> Spencer, *Colombia's Road to Recovery*, 43-51. Prior to 2002, US funding was restricted to Colombian counter-narcotics and crop destruction operations. As a result, Colombian counter-narcotics forces from the police and military often had more resources than the COLMIL.

Álvaro Uribe and Juan Manuel Santos, the GOC and COLMIL reversed the trends of negotiation failure and established a painful stalemate for the FARC and constructed a suitable and feasible way out that the group was able to pursue.

Álvaro Uribe was elected in 2002 by promising to retake the initiative lost during the Pastrana negotiation and defeat the FARC militarily. His landslide victory served as a referendum on the failed policy of negotiation.<sup>65</sup> It became the first time since the start of the Betancur negotiation that the government focused solely on a military solution and not some form of a negotiated settlement.

Uribe is described as a hard-liner with an “iron fist.”<sup>66</sup> His intention was to destroy the FARC, but his COIN policy actually enabled the creation of a MHS and the eventual successful negotiation. It revived a weak COLMIL and employed it to regain territorial control of Colombia. Over the course of Uribe’s eight years in office, the COLMIL effectively neutralized the FARC militarily, disrupted it financially, and delegitimized it politically through coordinated joint military operations. Although the strategy did not defeat the FARC, it successfully created enough “pain” for the group to acknowledge the existence of a MHS.<sup>67</sup>

The cornerstone of Uribe’s strategy was the Democratic Security Policy (DSP), which he introduced in 2003. Conceptually, DSP was a multifaceted COIN strategy that mixed security and reform efforts through territorial control and consolidation.<sup>68</sup> According to analysts like Jorge

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<sup>65</sup> Spencer, *Colombia’s Road to Recovery*, 62. Uribe was elected with 53 percent of the vote in a single round of elections, which was a first under the 1991 Colombian Constitution.

<sup>66</sup> Johnson and Jonsson, “Colombia: Ending the Forever War?,” 72.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas Marks, “A Model Counterinsurgency: Uribe’s Colombia (2002-2006) vs FARC,” *Military Review* 87, no. 2 (April 2007): 55.

<sup>68</sup> Spencer, *Colombia’s Road to Recovery*, 63. DSP had five major objectives: consolidate state control over all national territory; protect the population; eradicate illicit drug trafficking; build and maintain a deterrent capability; establish efficiency, transparency, and accountability.

Delgado, however, the main focus of DSP from the outset was a “military surge to confront the FARC’s armed guerrillas.”<sup>69</sup> With respect to conventional “clear, hold, build” COIN theory, DSP was effective at “clearing,” but never produced the necessary apparatus to “hold and build” once an area was secured.

Despite this flaw, security and Latin American policy experts credit DSP for the dramatic turnaround in Colombia’s security environment between 2002-2008.<sup>70</sup> The policy essentially supported the creation of conditions conducive to a MHS, which was the first step toward the ripe conditions that Uribe’s successor seized to negotiate the peace agreement. DSP accomplished this by employing the COLMIL against the three push factors proposed by Lustenberger: military, political, and economic.

Before Uribe could employ the COLMIL effectively, however, he needed to reshape the GOC and COLMIL’s approach to COIN. DSP took a decidedly more offensive approach, which enabled the COLMIL to take offensive actions to regain lost initiative. Taking the offensive required a major overhaul of COLMIL personnel, training, and equipment in order to overcome Colombia’s geographic restrictions. Uribe prioritized the growth and modernization of the COLMIL to enable an expansion of offensive operations to support DSP.<sup>71</sup> What was at one time considered a small, defensive-oriented garrison army quickly became a highly mobile and

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<sup>69</sup> Jorge E. Delgado, “Counterinsurgency and the Limits of State-Building: An Analysis of Colombia’s Policy of Territorial Consolidation, 2006–2012,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 26, no. 3 (2015): 409.

<sup>70</sup> For example: Davis, et al., *A Great Perhaps?*

<sup>71</sup> David Killcullen and Greg Mills, “Colombia: A Political Economy of War to an Inclusive Peace,” *Prism* 5, no. 3 (2015): 111. To pay for the improvements Uribe introduced a tax on the wealthiest tier of Colombians and leveraged a joint Colombia-US aid program worth \$7.5 billion known as Plan Colombia, which originally passed in 2000.

professional force capable of sustained offensive operations that for the first time put real pressure on the FARC and increased its level of pain.<sup>72</sup>

The first military campaign developed under DSP, called Plan Patriota, resulted in a rapid reversal of the security situation.<sup>73</sup> Plan Patriota benefitted from an increased military budget, a larger and more professional force, and an influx of aircraft and intelligence support from the United States. It took the COLMIL just a few short years to increase its targeting capacity, mobility, and lethality in raids that struck deep into the FARC's support zones. As Plan Patriota and DSP expanded, indicators of FARC violence such as murders and kidnappings dropped significantly.<sup>74</sup>

The FARC's subjective levels of pain arguably reached a critical point beginning in 2007 as the COLMIL demonstrated its capacity as a joint and intergovernmental force during the "war on the camps."<sup>75</sup> This phase of DSP targeted the FARC's bases of support and senior leaders through a High-Value Target (HVT) campaign. The HVT program was only possible through the newly acquired key enablers like increased joint intelligence capabilities, shared US intelligence, and US

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<sup>72</sup> Larry Rohter, "Armed Forces in Colombia Hoping to Get Fighting Fit," *New York Times*, December 5, 1999; Crandall, *America's Dirty Wars*, 352-353. Uribe increased the COLMIL budget from three percent to over four percent of the GDP for the remainder of his presidency to enable DSP. The COLMIL grew rapidly beginning in 2002 and by 2007 had increased its number of enlisted and officers from 280,000 to 415,000. The United States provided Blackhawk helicopters for critical air mobility and extended the operational reach, which was vital to DSP's goal of regaining territorial control. The COLMIL also benefitted from an upgraded intelligence infrastructure and relationships with US intelligence agencies, which improved its ability to target FARC's elusive senior leaders in ways never before possible.

<sup>73</sup> Davis, et al., *A Great Perhaps?*, 37. Plan Patriota objectives were to reverse the FARC's military advantages and retake territory from the FARC. By October 2003, the FARC had been forced back into its jungle sanctuaries, and according to its own after action reviews, its strategic offensive had been defeated.

<sup>74</sup> Adriaan Alsema, "Colombia Kidnapping Statistics," *Colombia Reports*, June 18, 2012 accessed November 2, 2016, <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-kidnapping-statistics>; Jorge E. Delgado, "Colombian Military Thinking and the Fight against the FARC-EP Insurgency, 2002–2014," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 6 (2015): 828. Kidnappings attributed to the FARC dropped to just 117 in 2008 from a height of 970 in 2002. By the end of 2006, homicide rates attributed to FARC guerillas were down forty-five percent.

<sup>75</sup> Davis, et al., *A Great Perhaps?*, xxviii-xxix.

weapons sales like GPS bombs. It is at this point in the conflict that a government policy and military COIN approach began to coalesce under a coherent strategy. Although that strategy was aimed at a decisive military victory that was highly improbable, it helped create the MHS needed for ripeness.<sup>76</sup>

On March 1, 2008, a precision-guided bomb penetrated the jungle canopy and killed a FARC senior leader named Raúl Reyes. The attack administered the first act of “shock therapy” that ended the FARC’s sense of invincibility and forced the FARC to reconsider its perception of the operational environment. Reyes was the first member of the FARC’s senior leadership to be successfully targeted by the GOC and COLMIL in the history of the conflict. Not long after came the death of the youngest member of the FARC high command, Iván Ríos, who was killed by his own bodyguard in exchange for reward money and protection from the FARC.

This was the period when the COLMIL finally began to create the perception of a MHS. According to US government statistics, the FARC was cut in half between 2001 and 2008.<sup>77</sup> The steep losses were due as much to casualties as they were to desertions. According to government figures, 4,559 FARC guerillas took advantage of GOC reintegration programs between 2002 and 2005.<sup>78</sup> Deserters cited reasons such as hunger, low morale, and fatigue from a rough life on the run

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<sup>76</sup> Johnson and Jonsson, “Colombia: Ending the Forever War?,” 68.

<sup>77</sup> Jess Ford, “Plan Colombia: Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security Has Improved; US Agencies Need More Detailed Plans for Reducing Assistance (GAO-09-71)” (Washington, DC: United States Government Accountability Office, October 6, 2008), 25, accessed November 9, 2016, <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-09-71>.

<sup>78</sup> Spencer, *Colombia’s Road to Recovery*, 71.

in the jungle as the primary reasons for leaving.<sup>79</sup> Even top leaders began to desert, such as an infamous commander of the 47th Front, Nelly Avila Moreno.<sup>80</sup>

The COLMIL's pressure is what contributed to a change in the FARC's perception of its prospects for success. In addition to the loss of personnel, the FARC lost territorial control of its support zones, which disconnected it from supportive Colombian peasants and denied it the safe havens it relied on for decades to avoid detection and stage attacks. By 2007 the GOC had achieved territorial control of 90 percent of Colombia compared to under 70 percent just four years earlier.<sup>81</sup> Territorial control by the state is supposed to allow the extension of state services to draw the population away from the insurgents. DSP, however, never built the apparatus to extend state control to these newly cleared areas. Even without a transition to "hold and build," however, the effect of territorial control contributed to increased pain for the FARC. It appeared that in Colombia, the population was not necessarily the center of gravity for the FARC. Instead, it was the effects the COLMIL had against the FARC itself that mattered most to increasing its levels of pain.

Since the FARC did not appear to draw the majority of its support from the population, it followed that one of the most important "push" factors to target turned out to be the FARC's economic center of gravity. The key to the FARC's survivability, at least since the 1990s, was drug trafficking, according to Colombian Army Colonel Alberto Mejía.<sup>82</sup> Armed with greater mobility, manpower, and intelligence, the COLMIL aggressively targeted the FARC's drug operations and

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<sup>79</sup> Crandall, *America's Dirty Wars*, 355.

<sup>80</sup> Jeremy McDermott, "Nelly Avila Moreno, FARC's 'Karina', Captured by Colombian Forces in War on Drugs," *The Telegraph Online*, May 19, 2008, accessed October 18, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1989610/Nelly-Avila-Moreno-FARCs-Karina-captured-by-Colombian-forces-in-war-on-drugs.html>.

<sup>81</sup> Ford, *Drug Reduction Goals*, 24.

<sup>82</sup> Anthony James Joes, *Resisting Rebellion: The History and Politics of Counterinsurgency* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 96.

destroyed more than three thousand cocaine labs in 2009 alone.<sup>83</sup> The emphasis of Colombia's anti-drug strategies shifted in 2006 when the increased intelligence apparatus and mobility of the COLMIL's elite counter-narcotics units made it more effective to dismantle cocaine production and trafficking as opposed to destroying crops.<sup>84</sup> Cocaine seizures increased from 127 metric tons in 2006 to 203 in 2009, and the number of laboratories destroyed increased from 2,300 in 2006 to 2,900 in 2009.<sup>85</sup>

The FARC eventually adjusted to the COLMIL's new capabilities under a new strategic plan known as *Plan Rebirth*, which it released in late 2008. Under the plan, the FARC returned to its traditional support zones, decentralized its leadership structure, and reverted to guerilla warfare.<sup>86</sup> This limited the group's exposure and the COLMIL's targeting opportunities. Still, the COLMIL had created a sense of vulnerability in the FARC that triggered a shift in the group's perception of the conflict as Santos took office in 2010.

Juan Manuel Santos succeeded Uribe as president in 2010, and despite expectations that he would continue his predecessor's DSP policies, he chose to pursue a negotiated settlement with the FARC. As both a former economic and defense minister, he recognized that a military victory over the FARC would cost more lives, resources, and the potential for economic prosperity. For Santos, the political objective was peace, not decisive victory. To achieve this objective, he created a

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<sup>83</sup> Alberto Mejía, "Colombia's National Security Strategy, a New 'COIN' Approach" (monograph, US Army War College, 2008), 25-26.

<sup>84</sup> Daniel Mejía, "Plan Colombia: An Analysis of Effectiveness and Costs" (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2015), 11; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Colombia Coca Cultivation Survey 2013*, Bogotá, Colombia, June 2014), 94-95, accessed March 29, 2017, [http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Colombia/Colombia\\_coca\\_cultivation\\_survey\\_2013.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Colombia/Colombia_coca_cultivation_survey_2013.pdf).

<sup>85</sup> UNODC, *Colombia Coca Cultivation Survey 2013*, 94-95.

<sup>86</sup> Colby Martin, "Colombia's New Counterinsurgency Plan," *STRATFOR Global Intelligence*, March 29, 2012, accessed September 16, 2016, <https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/colombias-new-counterinsurgency-plan>.



comprehensive COIN strategy that leveraged both the strength of the COLMIL and government reforms. This ultimately created a ripe moment for negotiations along the path to a peace agreement with the FARC.

According to Delgado, Santos did not share Uribe's assumption "that military force could compel the FARC to accept terms of surrender."<sup>87</sup> Santos' policies demonstrated that he believed military force had limitations that only offered marginal benefits with respect to ending the war. He recognized that in order to find a suitable peace, there needed to be sufficient reforms to the structural deficiencies of the state that produced the roots of conflict in the first place. Colombia simply lacked the capacity to simultaneously fight the FARC and conduct state building in its rural areas.<sup>88</sup> A negotiated settlement offered the opportunity to remove the FARC as an obstacle to the state building that was needed in the rural regions of the country, which once accomplished, would remove the roots of conflict.

Learning from his predecessors' misfortunes and mistakes, Santos recognized the need for both military pressure and political incentives. This is similar to ripeness theory's "push and pull" of the MHS and the way out, respectively. He referred to his strategy in his inaugural address as a "democratic prosperity policy."<sup>89</sup> It was a two-pronged approach aimed to force the FARC to the negotiating table through continued military pressure, while strengthening democratic and economic institutions that could serve as a peace infrastructure for a negotiated way out. Once

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<sup>87</sup> Jorge E. Delgado, "Colombian Military Thinking and the Fight against the FARC-EP Insurgency, 2002–2014," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 6 (2015): 848.

<sup>88</sup> Delgado, "Counterinsurgency and the Limits of State-Building," 410. Delgado supports this point by arguing that between the Uribe and Santos administrations, the COLMIL is the only agent of the state that has been able to extend state authority in areas formerly controlled by the FARC.

<sup>89</sup> Fernando Alzate Donoso, "Colombia Is Committed to Human Rights and 'Democratic Prosperity'," *The Guardian*, August 18, 2010, accessed January 23, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/aug/19/colombia-human-rights-democratic-prosperity>.

negotiations began, Santos announced that there would be no mutual ceasefire or demilitarized zones established until a peace agreement was signed. Unlike the failed tactics of the Betancur and Pastrana negotiations, this tactic allowed the COLMIL to maintain the pressure against the military, economic, and political foundations of the FARC's insurgency. It also ensured that the FARC would negotiate in good faith because the COLMIL retained the capability to punish the FARC for any attempts to avoid or stall negotiations once they began.

The main difference between the employment of military force by Uribe and Santos was that Santos directed the COLMIL to pursue limited objectives that raised the costs of rebellion rather than seek a decisive victory.<sup>90</sup> The COLMIL operationalized this guidance by pursuing lines of operations that were similar to Lustenberger's "push" factors such as operations that targeted the FARC's senior leadership, financial strength, and territorial control. Raids that target HVTs are sometimes dismissed as counterproductive in COIN, but as Daniel Byman asserts, targeting leaders of insurgent groups can work. He contends that the efficacy of such operations, when in support of limited aims, requires a rapid pace of attacks supported by a robust intelligence apparatus.<sup>91</sup> Within his first year, Santos authorized two HVT raids that killed the FARC's senior military commander, Mono Jojoy, and the group's general secretary, Alfonso Cano. According to former US Army general and architect of US Army COIN doctrine, David Petraeus, the COLMIL was so successful because it was able to execute precise, intelligence-based attacks against high-value targets,

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<sup>90</sup> Michael Shkolnik and Janiel Melamed, "Raising the Cost of Rebellion: Counter-Insurgency and the FARC Negotiations," *iAffairs*, March 18, 2015, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://www.iaffairscanada.com/2015/2882>.

<sup>91</sup> Daniel Byman, "Do Targeted Killings Work?," *Foreign Affairs*, March 1, 2006, accessed April 2, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/israel/2006-03-01/do-targeted-killings-work>.

implemented largely by skilled commandos.<sup>92</sup> The psychological effects of these operations combined with the inhibition of the FARC's operational capabilities contributed to the group's insistence on direct negotiations.<sup>93</sup>

These operations expanded under Operation Sword of Honor, a whole of government COIN campaign announced in 2013, shortly after negotiations officially began in Havana, Cuba. It created several mobile joint task forces from throughout the COLMIL to target the remaining FARC leaders, base areas, and narcotics operations.<sup>94</sup> While the pressure during DSP forced the FARC to reframe its situation, Sword of Honor ensured that the FARC maintained the perception of a MHS.

Sword of Honor ensured that the FARC could not escalate the conflict. Although there are few primary indicators of the impact it had on the organization, the reduction in violence is a strong indication that the campaign reduced the FARC's previous willingness to cheat during negotiations. By just 2014, 94 percent of Colombia's municipalities recorded no kidnappings and 90 percent of the population experienced no terrorist acts.<sup>95</sup>

The attacks against the FARC's drug operations had strategic impacts as well. By prioritizing counternarcotic operations against the FARC fronts that were responsible for cocaine production and trafficking, the COLMIL reduced production to record lows by 2014 and seized more than half of all cocaine produced that year.<sup>96</sup> The FARC still earned tens of millions of dollars

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<sup>92</sup> David Petraeus and Michael O'Hanlon, "The Success Story Next Door," Politico, September 24, 2013, accessed November 18, 2016, <http://www.politico.com/story/2013/09/general-david-petraeus-michaelohanlon-the-success-story-next-door-97316.html>.

<sup>93</sup> Shkolnik and Melamed, "Raising the Cost of Rebellion."

<sup>94</sup> Davis et al., *A Great Perhaps?*, 81.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

from drug trafficking, but in combination with the reduction of income from kidnapping and extortion, the losses cut off the possibility of escalating the conflict, thereby forcing the group to continue to pursue a political solution through negotiation.

Santo's COIN strategy also aimed to create a peace infrastructure that would enable a way out. His primary goal was not to introduce new reforms, but rather force his government to implement and enforce many of the reforms that had been accomplished since the Betancur presidency. Many of the reforms were either blocked outright by opposition politicians or poorly implemented due to lack of funding and oversight. The central component of Santos' peace infrastructure was the 2011 Land Restitution and Victims Law, which essentially acknowledged the government's responsibility for the structural inequality of property rights and the disproportionate level of suffering it imposed on Colombian's rural populations.<sup>97</sup> The law aimed to redress human rights violations on all sides of the war including the GOC, COLMIL, and paramilitaries who contributed to the nearly four million displaced persons who had property confiscated or destroyed. The Victims Law did not specifically address property rights, but it demonstrated a significant growth of government capacity to address and resolve the massive numbers of dispossessed civilians, most of whom came from formerly FARC-controlled areas. The passing of this law arguably tipped the scales for the FARC, who only a few months later officially agreed to negotiations.

The Victims Law was the most important first step to establish the prospect for a way out and achieve a fully ripe moment with the FARC. In addition to the pre-negotiations that established an agenda of land reform and government investment in rural regions, the Victims Law built trust

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<sup>97</sup> Davis et al., *A Great Perhaps?*, 99.

and assured the FARC that the two sides had compatible goals.<sup>98</sup> By establishing the way forward as suitable and feasible, the FARC was able to measure the benefits of a negotiated settlement as more beneficial than risking total defeat by continuing its military solution.

## Conclusion and Implications

Colombia's history of negotiations with the FARC illustrates President Santos' point from his Nobel speech that it is indeed more difficult to make peace than war. Negotiated settlements are often thought of as separate from war, occurring only after the fighting is over. As Colombia proved, however, negotiated settlements involve more than a simple dialogue between two competing sides. Their success hinges on more than just the substance of the meetings. Colombia's failures and success demonstrate that a successful negotiation begins well before two sides sit down at a negotiating table. They require a ripe moment so that each side is driven to cooperate and pursue a successful alternative solution. Ripe moments are created on the battlefield, through policy, and in the minds of the men and women at war. A successful negotiation is unlikely to occur unless these actions are integrated and coordinated under an organizing operational approach.

Colombia learned over the course of three decades how to apply military force to shift the FARC's perception of victory. Santos' learned from his predecessors' failures about the utility of military force against a determined insurgent force in the context of a state with limited capacity for state building. He showed that a strong military can be best employed to shape the perceptions of the insurgent using conventional COIN tactics, but tied to a different political end state. Rather than decisive victory, which proved too costly and perversely incentivized the FARC to continue its military struggle, Santos focused the COLMIL's operational strategy on raising the costs of rebellion without defeating the FARC. This left its leadership intact to formally end the group's

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<sup>98</sup> Paul Angelo, "A FARCical Deal in Colombia?," *Foreign Affairs*, August 7, 2016, accessed November 9, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/colombia/2016-08-07/farcical-deal-colombia>.

armed revolution in favor of a political solution. This resulted in the FARC's acceptance of a MHS and its willingness to pursue a way out.

The implication is that military force is meaningless unless it is paired with government actions to create a way out. Military pressure without a suitable and feasible way out will not "push" insurgents to negotiate in good faith, as was evident in the first two failures. Without a way out, military pressure will likely only harden an insurgency's resolve as it perceives it has no alternative to fighting. When a way out is formed through the construction of a peace infrastructure, however, it builds an insurgent force's trust that the underlying causes of conflict can effectively be addressed. It also creates compatible political structures in which both sides can participate, thus increasing the optimism for future success of negotiations.

These lessons have wider implications for potential improvement of US Army COIN doctrine. The most impactful way to improve current doctrine is to expand the section on negotiations. Operational planners need to understand that the Army plays an important role in setting the conditions for strategic-level negotiations. The concept of the MHS and how it must be tied to a political way out will drive planners to construct operational approaches that link action in time and space to the correct political objective. Including concepts like Lustenberger's push and pull factors can also assist planners in constructing lines of operations and efforts tied to those factors that relate to creation of a MHS and a way out.

A broader implication for the United States military as a whole is that it may need to reevaluate how it conceptualizes victory in a counterinsurgency. US Marine Corps Colonel Michael Griffin referred to an American preference for decisive victory, which he believes is incompatible with the reality of COIN conflict termination.<sup>99</sup> Other commentators have similarly addressed how

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<sup>99</sup> See Michael C. Griffin, *Rethinking Victory in Counterinsurgency* (monograph, US Army War College, 2014).

the American concept of victory presents an obstacle to linking military action to the correct political ends in a counterinsurgency fight.<sup>100</sup> Because of this preference, anything short of victory is considered a failure. If negotiated settlement is not considered a valuable or even suitable ending to a COIN conflict, it is difficult to imagine how doctrine will begin to address it sufficiently.

This is an area that needs further discussion and dialogue because COIN is unlikely to disappear as a security threat to the United States. In Afghanistan and elsewhere, doctrine must provide a role for the Army to play within a national COIN strategy that seeks negotiated settlement. The military tactics and procedures will remain the same, but the ends to which they are linked will necessarily change, and this will alter how campaigns and operations are designed. Anthony James Joes echoes the sentiments of many COIN experts when he says, “The true aim of any counterinsurgency is to reestablish peace in a society.”<sup>101</sup> As Colombia showed, decisive defeat of an insurgent group may not be possible, but nor is it always necessary to achieve the ultimate political objective of peace. Ripeness is one path toward peace that should be considered for further development of US Army COIN doctrine.

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<sup>100</sup> See J. Boone Bartholomees, “Theory of Victory,” *Parameters* (Summer 2008); Colin S. Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, March 2006); Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up, Twenty First Century Combat as Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>101</sup> Joes, *Resisting Rebellion*, 246.

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